

CRIPPLE CREEK (1890's)

Colorado mining was divided into three periods during the 19th century. The first occurred during the 1860's to the gold fields of Central City and South Park. The second period was the silver boom of the 1870's and 1880's primarily in the San Juans and around Leadville. The third period was another gold strike and it occurred during the 1890's in the mountains just west of Colorado Springs. This last region was to be last and greatest of the Colorado boom towns.

In 1867, the same year Walter Galloway received his farming homestead north of Colorado City, a fellow from Kentucky named Sam Womack applied for and was granted a homestead for cattle ranching in an extinct volcano crater west of Colorado City. Colorado City was the main business center for the homesteaders of the region and it would have been hardly possible for Galloway not to have been familiar with the Womack family. Sam's son, Bob Womack particularly was known his whole life to have spent much time in Colorado City's saloons and bordellos. Bob was an alcoholic and an extremely lazy cowboy. While he was watching the herds on the family property, Bob would spend alot of time prospecting the creeks around. After 12 years of searching he found some gold on what would soon be known to all as Cripple Creek. But Bob was known to all to be a crazy old drunk and no one took him serious in 1891 when he told them of gold on Cripple Creek. By the following year however his assays were proven and the rush to the Womack homestead was on. Bob however got drunk and his million dollar claims were sold for about \$200.

The gold found around Cripple Creek was very different from most gold found in the west. Usually gold was found near the surface, but Cripple Creek was running along the floor of an old volcano. Cripple Creek gold was mostly buried deep in this crater. Unlike California, the Black Hills, Alder Gulch, and other gold mining areas in the west, Cripple Creek from the outset was in need of big money and big machinery to develop it's deep bedrock ore. The independant prospector was practically non-existent here. Instead the region was full of hardrock miners who went deep into the earth each day to work for wages for some other person, or actually some big company.

The Panic of '93 saw the end of Colorado silver as a back of the U.S. dollar. Since Colorado's economy depended heavily on her silver mining industry, many miners found themselves out of work at the time Cripple Creek was just begining to get on her feet. They poured into the district in hopes of finding work. (see Cripple Creek labor war) Soon Cripple Creek boomed with people and wealth and it became Colorado's 2nd largest city by 1895.

Cripple Creek gold was responsible for the making of 30 millionaires, most of whom made their homes in Colorado Springs. In response to Cripple Creek's gold, the Springs languished and prospered greatly as a result. In the midst of a great depression (which hit particularly hard in the mid-west and western states) Colorado Springs seemed to not have even noticed the effects of the Panic of '93. The wealth that poured down the mountain into the city benefited all in the region, whether they be farmers (Robert Chambers' farm surely must have felt an indirect positive impact from Cripple's gold), businessmen, carpenters, common laborers, or whoever. Even dumpy little Colorado City saw a revival to life when she became the ore reduction center for Cripple Creek gold (see Colorado City). It was Colorado Springs' and Colorado City's greatest period of growth and boom, and all their citizens should have realized that it was Cripple Creeks gold that actually became for awhile their life's blood. It flowed heavily from her mines from 1893 until about 1904, then production slacked off until after World War II when soaring production costs closed most of her mines.

- 1) The New El Dorado by Phyliss Dorsett (1970)
- 2) Money Mountain by Marshall Savage (1952)